standing. A Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation is expected to be signed during the Next Indo-Russian Summit. We are trying to further improve and normalise our relations with the People's Republic of China.

(b) In our bilateral interaction with both the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, the subject of the NATO action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which took place from March 24-June 10, 1999 had come up for discussions. There has been no triagular interaction between India, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. It is however significant that the three countries arrived at similar positions on the subject, independently and without prior consultations.

Commercialisation of Issuance of Passport

2364. SHRI C. O. POULOSE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government accept that possession of the passport is right of the Indian Citizen;

(b) if so, what were the necessities for franchising the system instead of simplifying the issue of passport;

(c) whether the Government also intend to commercialise the issue of passport by introducing Tatkal system as in the Railway;

(d) if so, the reasons for such commercialisation and the reaction of the public to the scheme; and

(e) what are the hindering reasons for Government in the existing system which can be simplified to a large extent?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) An Indian citizen has a right to get a passport when needed, issuance of which is subject to his or her fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements to the satisfaction of the concerned authorities, as required under the Passport Act, 1967.

(b) There is no proposal with the Government for franchising the issue of passport.

(c) and (d) Recognising the genuine need of some passport applicants for urgent issue of passport the Government is formulating a 'Tatkal Scheme' under which for an additional amount, an out-of-turn passport will be issued within seven working days to eligible applicants who can be issued passport on post-police verification basis.

(e) Government is constantly endeavouring to improve the issue of passports and add to the convenience of passport applicants. Government have adopted several measures for streamlining the entire process of issue of passports. These inter alia include-increasing the availability of application forms by allowing printing, distribution and sale at nominal cost of passport forms by approved private printers; establishing 15 Passport Collection Centres to accept passport applications, in addition to the existing 28 Passport Offices; computerising processing procedures in 18 of the 28 Passport Offices; launch of the Central Passport Organisation web site; holding of Passport Adalats; simplification of police verification procedures etc. Among the new measures proposed in the coming months are introduction of machine writing of passport booklets at the Regional Passport Office, Delhi and transfer of personal particulars of passport holders from Index Cards to CD-ROMs.

International Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation

2365. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the response of Government on "Kunming Declaration" made in International Conference on Regional Economic Co-operation among China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar organised by Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming and Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi 15th—17th August, 1999;

(b) the action initiated on these issues;

(c) the details of initiatives to show India's leading role in strengthening regional cooperation by promotion of cross-border trade;

(d) the response of concerned countries to this effect; and